

## **Living as Citizens of Two Kingdoms: Finding Our Place Between Heaven and Earth**

In a world increasingly divided by political rhetoric and cultural tensions, followers of Jesus face a unique challenge: How do we navigate our dual citizenship as both earthly nationals and heavenly citizens? This question becomes particularly pressing when we consider our responsibilities to the nations where God has placed us while maintaining our ultimate allegiance to His eternal kingdom.

### **The Call to Prosper Where We're Planted**

The prophet Jeremiah delivered a surprising message to the Israelites who found themselves exiled in Babylon. Rather than instructing them to resist, withdraw, or simply wait for deliverance, God commanded them to actively engage with their new reality:

*"Build houses and settle down. Plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters... Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."* (Jeremiah 29:5-7)

This directive reveals a profound truth: wherever we find ourselves, we have a divine mandate to contribute to the flourishing of our communities. We may not be physical exiles in Babylon, but as believers, heaven is our true home. Every Christian lives in a nation that is not ultimately their final destination. Yet this temporary status doesn't excuse us from engagement—it actually defines how we should engage.

We're called to be invested residents, not isolated outsiders. We build, plant, raise families, and actively seek the welfare of our cities and nations. This isn't passive acceptance but purposeful participation.

### **Submitting to Authority While Serving a Higher King**

The Apostle Paul's instructions to first-century Christians living under Roman rule provide timeless wisdom for navigating governmental authority. Writing to believers who faced persecution under emperors like Nero, Paul nevertheless instructed:

*"Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God."* (Romans 13:1)

The word "submit" here means to willfully align ourselves with respectful cooperation toward civil government. This doesn't mean surrendering our convictions or silencing our

objections, but it does mean avoiding the worldly patterns of disrespect, rebellion, and chaos we often see displayed in public discourse.

Submission involves willing obedience, paying taxes, giving respect, and honoring those in authority—even when we disagree with their policies or character. This isn't about loyalty to flawed leaders but about honoring God through our obedience to the structures He has ordained.

Paul understood that God remains sovereign over all governments, whether democracies or dictatorships. Throughout history, God has used various forms of government to accomplish His purposes. Persecution has often fertilized the church and made it stronger. Conversely, freedom and prosperity have enabled unprecedented global missions and Bible translation efforts.

God can use any government to fulfill His plans, but when we have the choice, we should choose freedom and abundance that enable the gospel to spread.

### **Processing Life Through Biblical Truth**

In an age of unprecedented access to information, we face a paradox: we have more biblical resources available than any generation in history, yet we're among the most biblically illiterate. We carry entire Bible libraries in our pockets, have access to commentaries, concordances, and study tools with a simple search, yet polls consistently show declining biblical knowledge.

Before we vote, align with political parties, or post opinions on social media, we must pause and ask: What does God's Word say? The Bible doesn't address every modern issue by name, but it communicates timeless principles that apply to every changing landscape.

Biblical literacy isn't optional for effective Christian citizenship. We must be people who think biblically before we act publicly. This requires regular engagement with Scripture, not just during Sunday services but as a daily practice. It means gathering with others who can help us interpret correctly, because as Peter warned, Scripture is not a matter of personal interpretation to be twisted to our preferences.

### **Living with Conviction and Compassion**

America—and every nation—needs believers who live out their Christian faith with both conviction and compassion. Jesus called us salt and light. Salt preserves by slowing decay; light transforms environments by exposing what's hidden. Our lives should provide both preservation and revelation to the world around us.

Consider this: depending on the survey, between 24% and 45% of American adults identify as born-again Christians. That represents somewhere between 90 and 105 million people. Imagine the influence we could have if we simply began living out our biblical beliefs with conviction and compassion in every sphere of life.

We have no idea how our faithful living might impact someone who one day sits in a position of power. People are watching. As one public figure recently shared, he was drawn to Christianity by observing "rays of sunshine" emanating from believers—people whose faith motivated genuinely good behavior. Our lived-out convictions become invitations for others to discover the source of our hope.

### **Disagreeing Without Losing Our Witness**

What happens when we must dissent? Peter faced this question directly when he told governing authorities, "*We must obey God rather than human authority*" (Acts 5:29). There are moments when faithfulness to Christ requires respectful disagreement with governmental policies or leaders.

But here's the crucial point: we cannot lose our witness as Christians in the process of expressing our dissent. Paul instructed believers to "*live wisely among those who are not believers and make the most of every opportunity*" (Colossians 4:5).

Don't lose your Jesus over your politics. People are watching, especially during times of disagreement and hardship. These moments aren't obstacles to witness—they're opportunities. When colleagues ask how you're processing difficult governmental decisions, you have a chance to point them toward eternal truth: nations rise and fall, but God's kingdom endures forever. Policies come and go, but Scripture's truth has stood for millennia. Kings come and kings go, but there's a King of Kings.

Every conversation is an opportunity. Don't waste it by responding with the same anger, fear, or cynicism as the world.

### **Our Ultimate Citizenship**

Paul held this as a central concern for the early church, and it remains vital for us: we must align our allegiance with our ultimate authority. Writing to the Philippians, he said:

*"But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives, and we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior."* (Philippians 3:20)

We may hold earthly citizenship, but our ultimate allegiance lies in the kingdom of heaven. This eternal perspective doesn't diminish our earthly responsibilities—it properly orders

them. We love our nations, pray for them, and stand by them. But our ultimate allegiance belongs to God.

Jeremiah's message to the exiles didn't end with instructions to prosper in Babylon. God promised: *"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future... I will bring you back from captivity"* (Jeremiah 29:11, 14).

America, or whatever nation we call home, will not be our forever home. As disciples of Jesus, we eagerly wait and expect the kingdom—a place we can't yet see but that forms the foundation of how we live today.

### **The Greatest Need**

Ultimately, our nations need us to talk about Jesus more than anything else. Not to be silent about other matters, but to talk about Jesus more. Our countries need our hope, our grace, our faithfulness. They need disciples of Jesus who live with purposeful intention, knowing we've been positioned exactly where we are for such a time as this.

We're called to prosper and thrive—to be people of whom the world is not worthy. To follow God above all other things. To prioritize biblical truth. To show up and live out our beliefs with conviction and compassion. To seize opportunities even in disagreement to point people to Jesus.

Because ultimately, this isn't our home. Our home is with Him. And while we long for that day, we choose to be fully present in the days we've been given here, doing our very best to point people to the One who offers eternal citizenship in a kingdom that will never end.

# Scripture References from the Sermon

## Directly Referenced Scriptures:

1. **Jeremiah 29:4-7** - Instructions to exiles in Babylon about building houses, planting gardens, and seeking the peace of the city

2. **Romans 13:1-7** - Submission to governing authorities (the main passage of the sermon)

- Verse 1: Everyone must submit to governing authorities

- Verse 2: Rebelling against authority

- Verses 3-4: Authorities as God's servants

- Verse 5: Submit for conscience's sake

- Verses 6-7: Pay taxes and give honor

3. **Jeremiah 29:10-14** - God's promise to bring people back from exile, including "For I know the plans I have for you"

4. **Matthew 5:13-16** - Salt and light passage

5. **Acts 5:29** - "We must obey God rather than human authority"

6. **Colossians 4:5** - "Live wisely among those who are not believers and make the most of every opportunity"

7. **Philippians 3:19-20** - Citizens of heaven, eagerly waiting for Christ's return

## Alluded to Scriptures (not directly quoted but referenced):

8. \*\*2 Peter 1:20\*\* - No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation

9. \*\*Genesis 50:20\*\* - What the devil means for evil, God uses for good (principle from Joseph's story)

## Relevant Verses for Main Themes:

10. \*\*1 Peter 2:13-17\*\* - Submit to governing authorities for the Lord's sake

11. \*\*Titus 3:1\*\* - Remind believers to be subject to rulers and authorities

12. \*\*1 Timothy 2:1-2\*\* - Pray for kings and all in authority

13. \*\*Hebrews 11:13-16\*\* - Strangers and exiles on earth, longing for a heavenly country

14. \*\*James 1:22\*\* - Be doers of the word, not hearers only

15. \*\*Matthew 22:21\*\* - "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's"